THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS AND CHRISTIAN LIFE IN ROME IN THE SECOND CENTURY

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It was once remarked with much truth that the non-fulfilment of the expectation of the Parousia was the principal factor in the development of early Christianity. This is all the more important, because it was not the custom of the first Christians to speak of the "second" coming—that is a modern point of view —but of the "coming" of the Messiah. To them the Son of Man, Jesus, had come, and the resurrection proved that he was now the Messiah in heaven, but, as Professor Burkitt has recently pointed out, "Son of Man" does not mean "Messiah" in the full sense, but is rather the description given of the predestined and pre-existent Messiah, before he actually came as Messiah in function. The Parousia of the triumphant Messiah whom they expected was as much future for Christians as it was for Jews, and on this point the main difference between the two was that the former believed that they knew who the Messiah was.

Yet, though the coming of the Messiah was future, it was imminent, and hourly expected, and this expectation was the background of all the thought of the early Christians, which enabled them to accept such a method of life and series of doctrines as were only permanently possible if society underwent a radical change. As a matter of fact society did not undergo a radical change, and thus the main problem for the second generation of Christians was to accommodate to a society which after all showed no signs of passing away, beliefs and doctrines which had been based on the expectation of its transitoriness. In the end, therefore, it was the Christian doctrine and practice which underwent the change, and society which remained. Instead of entering a new world the Christians found themselves busy with the task of improving the old one. That is one aspect of the

picture.   The other is that in this task Christianity owes most
of its success to the expectation which it had once cherished.
The Messianic kingdom, its laws and its teaching, ceased to be
an expectation, but survived as an ideal.   Gradually, in prac-
tice if not in theory, men gave up looking for the coming of the
kingdom in which sin, suffering, poverty, and death would be
miraculously abolished; but nevertheless they had enjoyed the
vision of the time when these things would happen, and pressed
forward to make the world in which they were living—and would
continue to live—correspond somewhat more closely to the city
which they had seen.

It would of course be absurd to suggest that the second or
third generation of Christians would have expressed themselves
quite in this fashion: no generation is ever fully conscious of
the changes of thought which later historians find important.
But the readjustment of thought went quietly on for nearly two
centuries, and the struggle to which it gave rise between practice
and theory is really the most important thing in the history of
this period.   Such a process of readjustment is, however, so com-
plex that it is impossible to follow it clearly except by taking
special examples from the history of a single community, and
by noticing how in the first half of the second century changes
were introduced by reason of this gradual alteration in the
point of view, and the consequent conflict between theory and
practice.

For this purpose the church at Rome is the best one to study,
and for the first half of the second century practically the only
source of information is one book, the Shepherd of Hermas.
This curious book is in form an apocalypse, divided into Visions,
Mandates, and Similitudes.   It was written about 140 A.D. by Her-
mas, brother of Pope Pius I, but it is probable that it contains
various pieces, all written by Hermas, varying in date between
110 and 130.   It is an apocalypse, but a practical apocalypse,
and although the writer chose to express himself in this, as it were,
old-fashioned and conservative form, it is plain enough that
he was really a progressive thinker, and deliberately chose this
form of expression because he knew that human nature will often
listen to a reformer who wishes to change either appearance or

substance, but not to one who attacks both simultaneously. That is why progress is never direct, but spiral: one generation alters the substance, but leaves the appearance; the next sees the inconsistency, and changes the appearance as well. It takes two generations to complete the process, and that is reform; if the attempt be made to do both at once, it becomes revolution.

Hermas was a reformer: he was busy introducing changes in thought and practice, to recommend which he used an old and popular form of statement, and in the present article it is proposed to trace the way in which these changes affected, in the first place, the doctrine of baptism, and in the second place the position of prophets in the Christian community.

I

Whatever may have been the position of baptism in Palestine, it always held the central position in Christian doctrine and practice in the Graeco-Roman world. Christians regarded themselves as men who had accepted the Messiah, and had in some sense entered into his kingdom before his coming in power; they were "proleptic" members of the kingdom. The condition of their entry into it was acceptance of the Messiah, but the actual method of entry was baptism. In Christian baptism the convert was said to be born again to eternal life, to become a new creature, to be set free from evil spirits, and to be cleansed from sin. The importance of this doctrine for the propagation of Christianity in the second century can scarcely be overestimated. Baptism was the great "mystery" of Christianity, just as, for instance, the "taurobolium" was the great "mystery" of Mithraism. The oriental religions were all mystery-religions, or, as we now should say, sacramental: that is to say, they offered to their votaries participation in eternal life. The differences between them in this respect were formal rather than essential, as can be illustrated from the fact that the phrase "born again into eternity" (*in aeternum renatus*) is applied in an inscription to worshippers of Mithra as well as to Christians. Thus the Christian teachers had the great advantage, from a missionary point

of view, that they were teaching not only in a language, but also in a form of thought, which was understood by their public.

It cannot be accidental that all the forms of religion which became popular at this time in Rome were sacramental, and the explanation is probably to be sought in psychology. In the language of William James, there were in the beginning of the second century a number of "sick souls," who found a remedy in a combination of faith and outward acts to which a specifically healing character was given, and it is worth noting that, whether we accept the sacramental theories of the second century or not, the actual psychiatric efficiency of the sacraments themselves is undoubted. The theory was that baptism admitted to the Messianic kingdom, and incidentally, because all evil was excluded from that kingdom, gave release from sin. The fact was that the sick soul who believed was healed,—whether it would equally well have been healed if it had believed in something else is a question which is exceedingly important in itself but not important for the pure historian.

That Hermas fully accepted this central position of baptism is clear from *Vis.* iii. In this he describes a great tower, built over a spring of water, and explains that the meaning is, "your life was saved, and shall be saved, by water," and adds that the tower (the church) is founded on "the word ($\dot{\rho}\tilde{\eta}\mu a$) of the almighty and glorious Name." The reference to water and to the "Name" in baptism calls for no further comment. Or again in *Sim.* ix, 16 he says:

> For before man bears the name of the Son of God he is dead, but when he receives the seal, he puts off mortality and receives life. The seal, then, is the water. They go down, then, into the water dead and come up alive.

The doctrine of baptismal regeneration, taking place *ex opere operato*, could scarcely be more clearly expressed.

Such teaching was probably typical of all the mystery-religions, and it is plain that in the use of such modes of thought the danger of an absolutely unethical development was considerable. Theoretically, indeed, there is no room in such a view for a moral or ethical element. The baptized Christian was *ipso facto* a mem-

ber of the Messianic kingdom, had obtained eternal life, and was free from sin. In practice, however, it soon became clear that on the one point which could be observed—freedom from sin— the Christian was by no means safe. Theory and practice were in collision, and the problem as to what should be done became serious. As always happens, attempts were made—not wholly unsuccessful—to make the theory answer the facts, and at the same time to raise the practice to the level of the theory.

The theory had the necessary corollary that sin after baptism was unforgivable (cf. Heb. 6 4-6): practice had shown that if this were so, baptism was likely to be valuable only to men at the point of death. Sinlessness was to be a characteristic of the members of the Messianic kingdom, and it had therefore been supposed that it could and would be a characteristic of Christians; but experience proved that this was not the case. The theory obviously failed to satisfy the facts, and the result was, if we may read between the lines of *Vis.* iii, that it was becoming more and more frequently the practice to postpone baptism in order to avoid its responsibilities. In this vision Hermas sees the preparations for building the tower (the church) beside or over the water. The imagery is clearly drawn from the hills which surround the Campagna, where stone is quarried from a precipice and allowed to fall by a kind of chute.[1] This is, however, an inaccurate method of guiding the blocks, and many go far away from the place intended for them. So Hermas sees many stones which cannot be brought to the water, and therefore cannot be used for building the tower. These, he explains, are "they that have heard and are minded to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then, when they bethink them of the purity of the truth, they repent, and go again after their evil desires." That is to say, they are intended to represent those who postpone baptism too long, and are prevented by death. For them Hermas gives no hope of entry into the church, though he does not absolutely condemn them to final reprobation. "They may

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[1] I saw exactly the sort of scene (except that there was no tower) between Grotta Ferrata and Frascati, when the electric tramway was being laid. The stones slid down the cliff to their destination, but, just as Hermas describes, many of them failed to reach it.

repent, but they cannot fit into this tower.   But they shall fit
into another much lesser place, and this after they have been
tormented and have fulfilled the days of their sins."   It is not
quite clear what Hermas means by this: I am inclined to believe
that he refers to a repentance after death, and to something
closely resembling purgatory.

In any case it is plain that the suggestion that baptism should
be postponed was well known in Rome when Hermas wrote,
and that he rejected it.   Moreover history tells us that his view
was ultimately accepted, and that ecclesiastical practice went
to the other extreme by instituting infant baptism, of which there
is no trace till the second half of the second century.

Nevertheless the refusal to accept a postponed baptism as
satisfactory did not help to solve the original problem.   The
theory or doctrine still remained that the baptized person ought
to be sinless, and practice still proved that he was usually nothing
of the kind.   Hermas recognized the latter fact, but did not wish
to abandon the theory entirely.   In *Mand.* iv, 3, therefore,
he presents the problem to the angel who is instructing him:
"I have heard, sir, from certain teachers [2] that there is no other
repentance than that one, when we went down into the water
and received remission of our former sins"; and the angel replies
that this is indeed the case.   Thus the theory was not aban-
doned.   But it was altered, for the angel goes on to explain that
in the future there will be one further opportunity of repentance,
and a great part of the book after this is given up to the
explanations of the working of penitence, which is so realistically
handled that it is clear that the first steps have been taken on
the road which led to the institution of Penance.

Similarly, an effort was made to improve the practice so as
to correspond more exactly with the theory.   Clearly, the danger
was that men should argue to themselves, "We are saved through
baptism, we have been made sinless, and no act of ours can affect

* When one remembers that the Epistle to the Hebrews was well known in
Rome before the time of Hermas (cf. the long quotations in 1 Clement), it is diffi-
cult not to think that this is a reference to Heb. 6 4 ff.   It will be noted that
Hermas does not deny the truth of what Hebrews says; he only claims to super-
sede it on one point by a more recent revelation.

this happy result." There were indeed heretics who actually argued in this way, and thus no doubt gave color to the accusation of immorality which was so often brought against the Christians; and the natural answer to, and reaction against, their contention was to insist on the necessity for a higher ethical character in the Christian life.

Probably we can find an earlier trace of this tendency in 1 Peter. Whether that epistle was really written by St. Peter or not is a most difficult question. Personally, I am inclined to think that there is a shade of superior probability for the traditional view that it was written by St. Peter from Rome in the time of Nero. If so, it falls too early for our period, and it is a proof that the problem existed in Rome from the beginning. But there is also something to be said for a later date, which places the epistle in the beginning of the second century. In any case, it almost certainly came from Rome. Now, in speaking of baptism, the writer says that Noah and his family were "saved through water, which also in the antitype doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience towards God." The phrase trans_ lated "interrogation of a good conscience" is ἐπερώτημα τῆς καλῆς συνειδήσεως, and probably refers to some sort of moral vow made by the baptized person. Perhaps it is not rash to see in the Didache the best illustration of the probable nature of this vow. In it, as will be remembered, the ethical or moral treatise which we call the Two Ways, is used as a manual of instruction for catechumens.

In any case, if we read between the lines, it is easy to see that the writer of 1 Peter is afraid of a non-moral view of baptism. Still plainer is it in Hermas. In the ninth Similitude he sees twelve maidens gathered round the tower which represented the church, and is told:

> These are holy spirits, and a man can in no wise be found in the kingdom of God unless they clothe him with their raiment. For if thou receive the Name only, but receive not the raiment from them, thou shalt profit nothing, forasmuch as these maidens are powers of the Son of God. If thou bear the Name, but bear not his power, in vain shalt thou bear his name. The stones, said he,

which thou sawest cast away, these bore the Name, but put not on the clothing of the maidens. What, said I, is their clothing? Their very names, said he, are their clothing. Whosoever beareth the name of the Son of God ought to bear their names also, for the Son himself beareth the names of these maidens. And their names are Faith, Continence, Strength, Patience, Simplicity, Innocence, Purity, Joy, Truth, Prudence, Concord, Love.

The meaning is obvious; not only baptism, but a moral life is required: and Hermas is clearly protesting against the view that in baptism, by a purely magical use of the name and of water, the Christian obtains eternal life or membership in the Messianic kingdom, and is trying to impress his hearers or readers with the necessity for moral virtue as well as for the sacramental efficacy of baptism.

It would be interesting if we knew whether the other sacramental religions, such as Mithraism, went through the same development. In the absence of evidence, certainty is of course impossible, but I think the probability is that the course of events in the other mystery-religions was somewhat different, and that for a reason which is important because it points to one of the most serious differences between Christianity and the other oriental religions. Christianity made from the beginning a special appeal to the failures of society, to the "submerged tenth," the poor and the wretched. In this respect it differed sharply from the other sacramental religions which offered their privileges only to respectable and desirable persons. This distinction was clearly noted by Celsus,[3] who, in a manner which finds a curious echo in some modern forms of thought, heaped scorn on the Christians for admitting to their church all the undesirable elements which other religions excluded.

The result was, first, that the necessity for emphasizing the moral standard among the initiate was from the start far more urgent among Christians than among the votaries of the other mysteries, which appealed to the ninety and nine righteous

[3] Cf. Origen's quotation from Celsus in Contra Celsum iii, 59: οἱ μὲν γὰρ εἰς τὰς ἄλλας τελετὰς καλοῦντες προκηρύττουσι τάδε· ὅστις χεῖρας καθαρὸς καὶ φωνὴν συνετὸς . . . καὶ ὅτῳ ἡ ψυχὴ οὐδὲν συνοῖδε κακόν, καὶ ὅτῳ εὖ καὶ δικαίως βεβαίωται . . . ἐπακούσωμεν δὲ τίνας ποτὲ οὗτοι καλοῦσιν· ὅστις, φασίν, ἁμαρτωλός, ὅστις ἀσύνετος, ὅστις νήπιος, καὶ ὡς ἁπλῶς εἰπεῖν ὅστις κακοδαίμων, τοῦτον ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ δέξεται.

rather than to the one sinner who repenteth (and has a tendency
to backsliding), and, secondly, that, so far as the need was felt in
the other mystery-religions, they were inclined to meet the claims
of morality by raising their standard of admission, and warning
off all who in any way fell below it, while Christianity, which
could not adopt this method, was forced to try to insist on a high
standard after admission. It had started with the theory that
its sacrament not only admitted to eternal life, but removed sin,
and though experience had shown that this view was untenable,
and that Christians were after all sinful, it could at least try to
make them as little sinful as possible, and so render the gulf
between theory and practice somewhat less terribly evident.

Moreover, this fact probably stands in an intimate relation
to the problem why Christianity, which welcomed all the socially
and morally inefficient elements in the Roman Empire, survived
more successfully than the cognate mystery-religions which ap-
pealed only to the efficient.[4] The main reason, I think, is to
be found in the fact that morality, or ethics, is not the same thing
as religion, and cannot be regarded as a perfect measure of it.
Christianity, Mithraism, the religion of Isis, and the other mystery-
systems were quite definitely religious, not ethical, systems.
They made their appeal to the religious, not merely to the moral
and respectable, and by their success or failure in attracting them
they stood or fell. Religion is, as it were, one of the senses of
the soul, morality is another, and both are distinct from logic.
You will often find religious people who are neither innately
moral nor logical, and naturally moral persons who have no
sense of religion. Not only so, but there is even the same princi-
ple of compensation visible in the spiritual senses as in the physi-
cal. We all know that a blind man develops an abnormal sense
of touch which to some extent compensates for his lack of vision.
Probably it is the same with our spiritual senses: the man who has
naturally no sense of morality, as such, often has an extraordina-
rily high degree of religious feeling, which helps to compensate
for his defect; and, on the other hand, those who have no sense

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[4] It might probably be added that Mithraism, which was in the end the
most serious rival of Christianity, approached most nearly to its practice in this
respect.

of religion have frequently an extraordinarily high moral stand-
ard.   The point is of considerable importance in practical work,
and, as practical psychology comes to be better appreciated, will
no doubt be consciously used as a principle of social work.

Let me guard, however, against overstatement or misunder-
standing.   I hope it is clear that I do not mean that religion can
ever really be satisfactorily expressed in immoral conduct.   What
I wish to say is that morality is not a measure of religious expe-
rience, and that in any case conduct is not religion itself, but only
a translation of it.   Perhaps it may be put in this way.   Let us
say that religion is the conversation of man with his heavenly
Father; it is then quite clear that morality is something different,
because it is not conversation, but action.   The conversation
of father and child may lead to the child's doing what the father
wishes—or it may not.   But if it does not, that is no proof that
the conversation has not taken place; nor if a deaf child, who
cannot hear his father's voice, does what his father wished, is
he any the less deaf.   My impression is that there are many in
the human family who are deaf, so that they never hear the
Father's voice, yet do his will; and many others who hear his voice
quite well, and have frequent conversation with him, but are
quite unsuccessful in translating into action what they have
heard in this way.

To come back to history: the importance of this point of view
is that it explains why Christianity succeeded and Mithraism
failed.   Christianity did not in the beginning make the mistake
of confounding morality with religion, but accepted all those
who felt the religious impulse, in spite of the fact that morally
and socially they often belonged to the ranks of the inefficient
and undesirable.   From this point of view the importance of
Hermas is that he gives us a glimpse of the church at Rome
wrestling with the problem of making this class of converts under-
stand that, though religion be not morality, its truest manifes-
tation in life is nevertheless to be found in morality.

The increased attention which was thus directed to what may
be called the practical study of ethics had at least two important
effects.   Previously the Christians had regarded themselves as
those who were destined to be the members of the Messianic

kingdom, just as Jesus was destined to be the king, and it had been assumed that they possessed the qualities which would distinguish alike the king and the members of his kingdom, especially sinlessness, or, to express it in positive terms, righteousness. Experience forced them to admit that this was not always true, and Hermas formulated the view that the permanent retention of membership in the Messianic kingdom depended not only on the miraculous sacramental virtue of baptism, or on the power of the name of the Messiah, or even on the faith which accepted Jesus as Messiah, but also on the possession of various personal ethical virtues. This was bound to lead to a distinction on the one hand between sin and sin, and on the other between virtue and virtue. The distinction between sin and sin is made in 1 John, where a difference is drawn between sin unto death and sin not unto death; and thereby was taken the first step on the road leading to the later ecclesiastical doctrine of deadly and venial sin, and the elaborate casuistry of the Middle Ages. Hermas himself, however, did not pursue this line of thought; to him sin was sin, and his doctrine of penitence is the only concession which he makes from the teaching that sin after baptism is fatal. But on the other side—with regard to a distinction between virtue and virtue—he makes an important development, and formulates a teaching which in essentials does not differ much from that of supererogatory virtue. That is to say, he admits that there is a degree of virtue above that which is necessary for salvation, and that it will have a suitable reward in the future. This is clearly stated in his treatment of fasting (*Sim.* v, 3), in which he says:

> Keep the commandments of the Lord, and thou shalt be in favor with God, and shalt be inscribed in the number of them that keep his commandments. And if thou do any good thing beyond God's commandment, thou shalt win for thyself more exceeding glory and shalt be more honorable with God than thou wouldst have been.

The "good thing beyond the commandment" is

> To eat nothing but bread and water, and when thou hast told the sum of that day's expenses to which thou wouldst have been put for the meats consumed in it, thou shalt give it to a widow or orphan or one in need.

It is instructive to compare this with the story of the young man in Mark 10 17–31 who asked what he should do to inherit eternal life, and with the recension in Matthew. In Mark he is told that keeping the commandments is insufficient; in Matthew, that it is insufficient *if he wishes to be "perfect."* There is a radical distinction in thought between the two things, and Hermas and Matthew seem to represent the same kind of divergence from primitive thought, though I see no reason—rather the reverse—for thinking that there is any literary connection between them. They both point to the time when Christians began to distinguish between membership in the Messianic kingdom or salvation, or eternal life, or whatever other name they may have given to it, and high or low position within the kingdom, and to speak of those who were "perfect" in distinction from those who, while unquestionably members of the kingdom, did not reach to the highest position.

It is plain that we are here at the beginning of that development which led to mediaeval casuistry with its nicely graded apportioning of an appropriate label for every possible human act, varying from deadly sin to supererogatory virtue; nor is it, I think, less plain that this development was due to the gradual change of attitude towards life involved in the passing away of the expectation of the coming of the Messianic kingdom and the corresponding rise of the Catholic church. Primitive Christianity meant the change of life from bad to good. It thought in absolutes. The Catholic church meant the transformation of life from worse to better; it thought in relatives. The change was enormous; it is the most important thing in early church history, and obviously was necessary to make Christianity the practical power for good which it became. Yet, however paradoxical it may be, it is profoundly true that the success was possible just because the change was never complete. However much the church was occupied with making men better, instead of making them good, it never wholly forgot the splendor of its first vision of a sinless world, and centuries later, when the memory of its early hopes had grown dim, and the church was degenerating into a society whose motives were dubious and practices lamentable, the power of the Reformation lay largely in the

fact that its leaders recognized the ideal of Christianity to be the formation of a new creature rather than the improvement of an old one.

II

Just as the gradual movement of the centre of the Christian life from the expectation of the Messianic kingdom to the practical needs of the Catholic church influenced the development of doctrine, as was shown in the instance of baptism, so it produced an even more remarkable change on the side of organization. It is plain that a community which is momentarily expecting a complete and catastrophic change in the character of society is unlikely to possess more than the necessary minimum of organization; it is not less plain that as soon as this expectation passes into the background the need of organization will be increasingly felt, and those who have some official place in the organization will gain an importance hitherto denied to them. This is what happened in the early church, especially in Rome, and the importance of Hermas is that it gives us, if not exactly an account of the change, at least a picture of the state of things which previously obtained, showing us the points which necessitated this organic development.

This question brings us into some disputed matters, and I think that the study of history shows that the truth has not been the monopoly of either party in the dispute. If we ask who were the most important people in the Christian church in the first generation, the answer undoubtedly is, the Apostles and Prophets. If we go on farther, and ask who was the most important person in the church at Rome at the end of the second century, the answer unquestionably is that it was the Bishop. But the difficulty comes when we inquire how this change took place; for that is precisely the problem to which no undoubted or unquestionable answer can be given. The importance, therefore, of Hermas is that, with some help from cognate documents, he throws enough light on the question to enable us to reach a solution which possesses a very high degree of probability.

It would not be unfair to say that on the main question students have been divided into two parties. One party has argued that

the bishops of the end of the second century represent the apostles of the first, and has based its contention on certain references which go to show that in the first century the apostles appointed bishops (or presbyters—probably the two words applied to the same office [5]) in various communities. Against this view another party has emphasized the distinction in function between the early bishops and the apostles, has disputed the reasoning of the opponents, and in the heat of argument has very foolishly thrown unnecessary doubt on facts vouched for by excellent evidence. The facts seem to be opposed to the extremists of either school. It is clear, on the evidence of the New Testament and all succeeding literature that in all important communities there were from the beginning local officials, appointed in the first place probably by the apostles, and that they were sometimes called bishops, sometimes presbyters. Thus the apostolic appointment of some presbyters is probable: but, on the other hand, it is not less clear that the functions of an apostle were quite different from those of a presbyter or bishop, and that functionally the apostle is akin to the prophet, not to the presbyter.

The discovery of the Didache in 1883 is really the starting-point of progress in the solution of this problem. It corrected once for all our ideas as to the meaning of the word "apostle," and as to the importance of the Christian prophets. We are apt to regard "apostle" as meaning one of the twelve disciples, and even when we outgrow this untenable view (untenable because the word is applied in the New Testament to several outside the number of the Twelve) we remain under the influence of a false, or at least unnecessary, interpretation of 1 Cor. 9 1. Here St. Paul, arguing that he is at least the equal of the other apostles, says, "Am I not free, am I not an apostle, have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" and this has been explained to mean that an apostle must have seen Jesus. There is nothing in the context to justify this view. "Have I not seen Jesus?" is more probably additional to "Am I not an apostle?" than explanatory of it, for the question was not whether Paul was an apostle, but whether he

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[5] Some years ago one would have made this statement with much confidence. But J. Réville's book Les origines de l'épiscopat suggests other possibilities. They do not, however, seriously affect the present question.

was the equal of the original apostles. It is true that the question has usually been taken by commentators as if it were explanatory. But this is merely the after effect of the old view that apostle must mean "one of the Twelve," and that it is historically improbable is clear from the Didache, in which "apostle" is not a title given to a special class of men who had once been in the company of Jesus, but to men inspired by the Spirit who went about spreading the gospel among those who had never heard it, and founding churches wherever they met with success.

These "apostles" were closely connected in character with the prophets. According to the Didache these also travelled about, but their object was the edification of existing churches rather than the foundation of new ones. The difference between apostle and prophet was therefore functional, not essential, for both were men through whom the Holy Spirit spoke, and they revealed truth to the world through his inspiration. But a prophet—and probably not an apostle—might settle in a definite community, and it is quite clear that wherever prophets were, they were the spiritual leaders of the Christians in that place, not because they had a definite office, but because they had a special gift.

The outburst of prophesying was one of the marks of the Christian community, and, as the account of the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 shows, it was recognized as a definitely eschatological sign that the Messianic kingdom was at hand. The writer of Acts explains the phenomena of Pentecost as the fulfilment of the words of Joel, "It shall come to pass in the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions, and on my servants and on my handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit, and they shall all prophesy." That "in the last days" is not in the original, but in Luke's correct explanation of the context, is worth noticing because it shows that to him the eschatological significance of Pentecost was the principal thing. It is also noteworthy that the last phrase, "and they shall prophesy," is not in the original. If it be a true canon of exegesis, as I believe, that divergence in quotations from the original often indicates the point

which the quoter regards as important, then clearly Luke regarded prophecy as one of the signs of the coming of the kingdom. The position of prophets in the early church is thus seen to be the natural consequence of the eschatological Messianic expectation, and, as this expectation began to be falsified by time, the position of the prophets lost at least part of its basis.

Thus at the beginning of the second century prophets were the most important people in the settled order of the community, but the eschatological reason for their importance was gradually weakening. This, however, would not have been sufficient to destroy their position (for the eschatological expectation was not the only reason for honoring them) had not a new and serious problem arisen. This was provided by the "false prophets" and is dealt with by Hermas in the eleventh Mandate. In this Hermas says:

> He (the shepherd) showed me men seated on a bench and another man seated in a chair; and he said to me, "Seest thou them that sit on the bench? These are faithful, but he who sits on the chair is a false prophet who destroys the sense of the servants of God,— of the doubleminded, that is, but not of the faithful. The doubleminded, then, come to him as a soothsayer, and ask him what haply shall befall them; and the prophet, having in himself no power of the divine Spirit, answers them according to their demand and according to their unholy desires, and fills their souls as they wish."

That is to say, he recognizes that there were in the church not only the true prophets, but also false prophets, and that this gave rise to the double problem,—how is it that there are false prophets, and how can they be distinguished so that the true may be accepted and the false rejected?

To the first of these questions Hermas never gave the answer that the false prophet was an impostor; such an idea would have been completely opposed to the whole trend of thought in those days. He did not hesitate to proclaim the inspiration of the false prophets to be as certain as that of the true prophets. All prophets are inspired; only some have the wrong sort of inspiration. The false prophet prophesies "because the devil fills his spirit."

This view is characteristic of early Christianity, and is very

important for any right appreciation of the growth of doctrine. The Christian of the second century explained all psychological phenomena, including religion, in the terms of obsession. The world, so one may express the theory, is full of all sorts of spirits or angels: some of them are good, some are evil, the good proceed from God, the evil from the devil, and all, whether good or evil, have the power, under favorable circumstances, of taking possession of men and inspiring for good or for evil. This belief was derived by Christianity from Judaism, and Judaism probably obtained it from Persian sources; it is therefore one of the points in common between Christianity and Mithraism, and this fact is rather important, not only because it explains some of the great resemblances between Christianity and Mithraism, but because it brought Christianity into the main stream of thought in the Roman Empire. When a Christian spoke of obsession by an evil spirit or inspiration by a good one, he was not talking in a language other than that which men were accustomed to hear; he was using the same *Weltanschauung* as his hearers. The tendency to explain psychology and physiology in terms of spirits was as common then as is now the attempt to explain them in terms of microbes.

Nor must it be thought that "spirit" was used in the modern sense of an influence or an essential characteristic. The Christians of the second century, like most of their contemporaries, thought of spirits as real beings. The difference between those days and ours may be illustrated by saying that when we speak of a "spirit of holiness" we are scarcely conscious that we are personifying an abstract quality,—all the emphasis is on the "holiness"; but when a second-century writer used the same phrase, the emphasis was all the other way,—on the "spirit," not on the "holiness," and he was so conscious that he was speaking of a definitely existing being with an individuality as great as his own, that the idea of the abstract quality was quite secondary. To us such phrases are the personifications of abstractions, to them they were the qualities belonging to persons.

This theory of the universe, that it is full of spirits whose working explains the phenomena of natural and spiritual life, was applied widely. Disease was explained as an attack from

an evil spirit, so also was sin, and so was magic, soothsaying, and false prophecy. In the same way the Christian was a man who had been taken possession of by a good spirit, and a true prophet was a man possessed by a divine spirit of prophecy which had a message to deliver. Thus not only prophecy, but all religious or psychological phenomena, true and false, were explained as various workings of different spirits. As an illustration may be taken the interesting passage in which Hermas explains the reason why bad temper leads to sin (*Mand.* v, 1):

> Be long-suffering and prudent, said he, and thou shalt have dominion over all wicked works, and shalt do all righteousness. For if thou be long-suffering, the Holy Spirit which dwells in thee shall be clear, and not darkened over by another evil spirit. . . . But if any ill temper approach, immediately the Holy Spirit, which is delicate, is straitened by not having clear space, and seeks to depart from the place, . . . for that both the spirits then should dwell together is unprofitable and evil for the man in whom they dwell.

The answer, then, of Hermas to the first question, What is the nature of a false prophet? was simple: he is a man whom an evil spirit inspired to prophesy, and for his generation this answer was satisfactory and decisive.

The second question was far more difficult, and of greater importance for the church life of the time. How is it possible to tell the difference between the true and the false prophet, or, in the language of 1 John, to "try the spirits"? Hermas gives his answer in the eleventh Mandate. He suggests that we can tell the difference between a true and false prophet by noting their conduct (*Mand.* xi, 9–14).

> From his life prove the man that has the divine Spirit. First, he that has the divine Spirit which is from above, is meek and peaceable and lowly, and refrains himself from wickedness and vain desire of this world, and makes himself poorer than all men, and answers nothing to any when insulted, and does not speak solitarily, nor does the Holy Spirit speak when a man would speak, but when God wills that he should speak, then he speaks. Whenever, therefore, the man who has the divine Spirit comes into a meeting of righteous men who have faith in the divine Spirit, and the congregation of those men make their prayer unto God, then the

angel of the prophetic spirit which obsesses him fills the man, and
the man, being filled with the Holy Spirit, speaks to the congregation
as the Lord will. . . .

Hear now about the spirit that is earthly and void, and hath
no power, but is foolish. First, the man who thinks that he has the
spirit exalts himself and wishes to have the preëminence, and
straightway he is heady and shameless and full of talk and conver-
sant among many luxuries and other deceits, and he receives pay for
his prophecy, and if he receive not he prophesies not. Can, then,
a divine spirit receive pay and prophesy? That a prophet of God
should do so is impossible, but the spirit of such prophets is earthly.
And then he never at all approaches an assembly of righteous men,
but flees from them. And he joins himself to the doubleminded
and empty, and prophesies to them in corners and deceives them
by speaking in all things emptily according to their lusts. . . .
When however he comes to a full assembly of righteous men who
have the divine Spirit, and intercession is made by them, that
man is emptied and the earthly spirit flees away from fear of him,
and he is struck dumb and utterly crushed, not being able to speak
a word.

The policy here suggested was not a new one. We find it
first in Matt. 7 15–20.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing,
but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by
their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?
Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt
tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil
fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree
that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the
fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Whether this passage was really spoken by Christ, or represents
rather the special exegesis of some saying of his which the church
gave at a later time, is impossible to say. The principle, "by
their fruits ye shall know them," was no doubt in the section
of the source (Q) on which the Sermon on the Mount is based,
for it is found both in Matthew and Luke: the question is whether
the reference to false prophets was in Q but omitted by Luke,
or is simply a redactoral comment by Matthew. For myself
I think it more probable that Matthew inserted than that Luke
omitted it. But this is not important for the present point:

the text of Matthew, as it stands, is almost certainly earlier than Hermas, and represents the same policy of a "conduct test" applied to prophets in order to distinguish the true from the false.

The same policy can also be found in the Didache (xi, 3 f.):

> Now concerning the apostles and prophets, according to the decree of the gospel so do ye. Let every apostle that cometh to you be received as the Lord; but he shall not stay save for one day; but if there be necessity, the next day also; but if he stay, then he is a false prophet.

That is the rule for apostles; they are missionaries, and a missionary has no business to wish to stay too long away from his work, which is among the unconverted, not among those who are already Christians.

> And every prophet speaking in a "spirit" ye shall not try nor judge, for every sin shall be forgiven, but this sin shall not be forgiven.[6] But not every one that speaketh in a spirit is a prophet, but only if he have the ways of the Lord; from their ways then shall the false prophet and the true prophet be known. And no prophet appointing a table [probably this means ordering an Agape to be held] in a spirit will eat thereof, unless he be a false prophet.

It is interesting to notice that the Johannine epistles represent a different point of view. They wish to apply to prophets a dogmatic test.

> Beloved (says the writer of 1 John 4 1-2) believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the spirit of God; every spirit that confesseth Jesus as Christ come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God. . . . Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Contrast this with Hermas and with the Didache, and I think we must admit that we have to do with two independent attempts in the different localities to deal with the question of the false

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[6] Note here the earliest and undoubtedly correct interpretation of the "sin against the Holy Spirit," namely, to reject the message of an inspired prophet, because he is the mouthpiece of the Spirit.

prophets. Hermas is an undoubted proof that the question was very important in Rome in the first half of the second century, and that then the conduct test rather than the dogmatic test was applied.[7]

The difficulty of the policy supported by Hermas was practical. Who was to apply it? Who was to judge between prophet and prophet? Ignatius had already given the answer: it was to be the bishop. It is uncertain whether the writings of Ignatius were known in Rome in the first half of the second century, but it is surely obvious that the solution he suggests was certain to be made. Perhaps it is worth while recalling the evidence which exists as to the bishops or presbyters in Rome at this time. Hermas helps us here but little. He refers to the bishops, but only in passing, and the source of our knowledge is Clement, who wrote in the last years of the first century (1 Clem. 42 4, 44 1–3). He states that the apostles appointed the

> First-fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons unto them that should believe, . . . and afterwards they provided a continuance, that if these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministrations. Those, therefore, who were appointed by them, or afterwards by other men of repute with the consent of the whole community, . . . we do not think it just to cast out from their ministration.

If we take this passage in connection with the various references in the New Testament to bishops or presbyters (and Clement, like St. Paul, used the words as synonymous), here is sufficient proof that there was in every community an organization of administrative officers, called either bishops or presbyters. They were not apostles, and they were not prophets—from these they differed both functionally and essentially—but they were the administrative heads of the community, and as such would naturally be the mouthpiece of opinion, and have the last word of judgment in matters of fact, such as the behavior of some stranger who claimed to be a prophet, was suspected of

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[7] Hermas may indeed even be used as an argument to show that the Johannine literature was not introduced in Rome until after the time of Hermas. It is not impossible that Justin Martyr brought it with him,—but this question deserves separate treatment.

being a false prophet, and had to be tested by the rules laid down in the Didache, in Hermas, and in Matthew.

Moreover, we know, if Epiphanius may be trusted, that at all events Marcion, when he came to Rome, applied to the presbyters for recognition and failed to obtain it, so that we shall run little risk of error if we say that by the middle of the second century the prophets had so far come under the control of the administrators of the church that the latter had the power of deciding who was and who was not a genuine prophet. Thus the result of this problem of the early church—the question of true and false prophets—was the subjection of prophets to bishops and the beginning of that long chapter of history in which the episcopacy became not only the administrative arm of the church but the tribunal which judged the quality of men's spiritual life and the accuracy of their theological statements.

That this solution had its dangers is obvious from the study of history; but under the circumstances it was absolutely unavoidable, and it belongs to the general process of readjustment which was rendered necessary by the passage of the church from a community living in the momentary expectation of the coming of the Messiah to one in which that expectation was gradually fading into a hope for a more or less distant future, and Christians were settling down to the more actual problems of life. The extreme importance of Hermas is that it gives us glimpses of this process of readjustment.